



Vachhani, S. (2020). Luce Irigaray's Philosophy of the Feminine – Exploring a Culture of Sexual Difference in the Study of Organizations. In R. McMurray, & A. Pullen (Eds.), *Rethinking Culture, Organization and Management* (Routledge Focus on Women Writers in Organization Studies; No. 4). Routledge.
<https://www.routledge.com/Rethinking-Culture-Organization-and-Management/McMurray-Pullen/p/book/9780367234102>

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Routledge at <https://www.routledge.com/Rethinking-Culture-Organization-and-Management/McMurray-Pullen/p/book/9780367234102>. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

Chapter Submitted to 'Foundational Women Writers in Management and
Organization'

Edited by Robert McMurray and Alison Pullen (Routledge Publishers)

**Chapter Title: 'Luce Irigaray's Philosophy of the Feminine – Exploring a
Culture of Sexual Difference in the Study of Organizations'**

Author: Sheena J. Vachhani

Introduction

Since the publication of *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray has founded some of what can now be thought of as the central claims of poststructuralist, French feminism. Irigaray makes a turn to embodiment where the body is a site for the creative possibilities of the body, and her work initiates visceral and embodied forms of thinking about organizations. Irigaray intervenes in a number of philosophers' work, from Plato to Nietzsche, as a way of unearthing the silent feminine and making it present. Irigaray's work has gained prominence in management and organization studies and this chapter outlines the contribution of her work to ideas around: the question of difference and the ethics of sexual difference; the influence of psychoanalysis and the maternal in her work; critiques around biological essentialism; and processes and strategies of writing that disturb and disinter conventional textual practices.

Her analysis of western philosophy centres on the critique of the existence of one subject, the masculine subject conceived through patriarchal order, that is to say the predominance of masculinity for understanding social and symbolic life. In Irigaray's words, 'It is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it – that amounts to the same thing in the end – but of disrupting, and modifying it, starting from an "outside" that is exempt, in part, from phallocratic law' (Irigaray, 1985b: 68). Irigaray has been accused of perpetuating essentialist readings of identity and sexed bodies, however, proponents of her work suggest that her writing can be read as a form of strategic or political essentialism (Stone, 2006).

Irigaray was born in Belgium in 1932 and holds doctoral degrees in Philosophy and Linguistics and also trained as a psychoanalyst. She has also been active in women's movements, especially in France and Italy. Irigaray's work has predominantly attracted a feminist audience although she is also well positioned as a philosopher, especially in her earlier works. She has been critical of being asked biographical and personal questions. As Whitford (1991a) writes, Irigaray saw this as a distraction or disruption for those engaging with her work based on the well-founded understanding that women are neutralised and reduced through their biography. She was an outspoken critic of psychoanalysis exemplified in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, first published in 1974, after which she lost her post in the Department of Psychoanalysis at Vincennes (Whitford, 1991a) and was exiled from the Ecole Freudienne de Paris founded by Jacques Lacan. As Whitford (1991a) also notes, what is interesting is that her work is a critique from within psychoanalysis. This critique positioned her as an outsider in psychoanalysis and spurred her thinking a culture of difference driven by social and symbolic change. This chapter continues by developing these threads within Irigaray's oeuvre and discusses how her texts have been used to explore organizational themes such as: sexual difference, psychoanalysis and organizations, and writing materiality in academic practice.

The Question of Difference in Feminist Politics: Cultivating a Culture of Difference

“And what passages are there from the one to the other? You do not come inside me. You follow your own routes through me. But I, am I not a reminder of what you buried in oblivion to build your world? And do you not discover all the past dangers as you return to hollow out this crypt? And, you, are you not a light giving me no light nor life.” (Irigaray, 1992:36).

Difference has become a central issue in feminist theory (Weedon, 1999; Hekman, 1999; Lennon and Whitford, 1994) and post-structuralism 'has queried the status and explanatory power of general theories (metanarratives) such as

liberal humanism and Marxism and produced a discursive shift which – it is often argued – opens up space for alternative voices, new forms of subjectivity, previously marginalised narratives, and new interpretations, meanings and values’ (Weedon, 1999: 4). As Susan Hekman discusses, differences involve power, ‘If we challenge those differences by asserting their opposites, the challenge is necessarily parasitic on the difference itself, not an escape from it’ (Hekman, 1999:11).

Phelan (1999:56) asserts that discussions concerning identity and difference within feminist politics have centred around ‘two lines of cleavage and connection. The first deals with the relations between men and women. Should the goal of feminist politics be for women to assert and achieve sameness with men, or should it be a recognition of women’s distinctive, yet valuable, specificity? The second concerns relations amongst women. If we say that “women” are either “the same as” or “different from” men, to which women (and which men) are we referring? It is clear that women differ among themselves as much as men differ from women’. Irigaray attempts to redefine and rearticulate the feminine subject whilst not reducing the feminine to the same or to one (that is male/masculine).

Irigaray’s oeuvre promotes a ‘culture of difference’ (Irigaray, 1993c). As Fuss (1992) propounds, some critics of Irigaray appear to have missed the figurative character of her *body* language. Irigaray could be said to *re-metaphorise* the female body in a way that reconceptualises the subject as embodied. Irigaray attempts to conjure up an ‘other woman’, a woman who does not incarnate the patriarchal femininity of Freudian theory. ‘The new woman, rather, would be beyond phallocentrism; she would deploy a new, feminine syntax to give symbolic expression to her specificity and difference. Irigaray’s most striking attempts to release, conjure up or invent this other woman are lyrical evocations of a nonphallic, feminine sexuality’ (Fraser 1992:10). Essays such as ‘*When Our Lips Speak Together*’ (Irigaray, 1985b) evoke an eroticism premised on the continual demonstration of difference through the self-touching of ‘two lips’. Neither clitoral nor vaginal this would be a feminine pleasure that exceeds the

binary opposition of activity/passivity, for example (Fraser, 1992). As Irigaray writes, 'My lips are not opposed to generation. They keep the passage open. They accompany birth without holding it to a – closed – place or form. They clasp the whole with their desire. Giving shape, again and again, without stopping. Everything is held together and not held back in their fond embrace. They risk making abyssal anything which would have an origin or roots in one definitive creation.' (Irigaray, 1992:65-66). Having outlined the question of difference and the development of a culture of difference, I further this discussion by exploring the influence of psychoanalysis in Irigaray's work.

Irigaray, Psychoanalysis and Studies of Work and Organization

Irigaray's work has gained prominence in organization studies in recent years and has tended to focus on the organization of sexual difference brought out in her work rather than its psychoanalytical tenets (notable exceptions being Fotaki, 2009a; Kenny & Bell, 2011; Metcalfe, 2007; Vachhani, 2012). For example, Oseen (1997) explores the symbolization of sexual difference in relation to leadership while Atkin, Hassard and Wolfram Cox (2007; see also Hassard, Keleman, & Wolfram Cox, 2008) use the concepts of residue and excess at the heart of Irigaray's mimetic strategy, a key feature of her writing explored later in this chapter, to push taken-for-granted discourses to their limit. Vachhani (2015) discusses the transformative and activist potential of feminine writing that offers a practical politics for changing organisations. Metcalfe (2005) casts a critical eye on the exploration of Irigaray's work in critical management studies, especially how sameness and difference are reinforced by phallogocentric discourses (that is to say, thinking that centres around the presence or absence of the phallus). In contrast, Fotaki (2009) provides a close examination of Irigaray's feminist psychoanalytic approach in relation to academic work. Vachhani (2012) also draws on the psychoanalytical tenets of Irigaray's work to address the political and ethical dilemmas that arise from the subordination of the feminine. Building on these discussions, Fotaki et al (2014) call for a feminist *écriture* of/for organization studies that does not suppress and

conceal possibilities for understanding difference as a recognition of the feminine.

Irigaray's concerns are with the imaginary and symbolic and in developing an account of subjectivity that acknowledges the existence of different sexes, different bodies, forms of desire and ways of knowing (Grosz, 1990). The value and importance of her theoretical engagement with the maternal-feminine provides resources for critically evaluating psychoanalysis as it has been developed in organization studies. In Irigaray's terms, the systematic suppression of femininity, thus the suppression of difference, has reduced women to the 'economy of the same' (see Whitford, 1991a, 1991b; Irigaray, 2000).

The exclusion of the maternal from the history of western philosophy, and indeed culture, represents for Irigaray (1992, 1993b, 1999, 2004, for example), the banishment of women. Irigaray addresses the political and ethical dilemmas arising from this position, significant for better understanding gendered relations in organizations, developing a feminine imaginary and for new spaces of symbolization and representation for women. Irigaray's search for a female imaginary is perhaps why some critics have labelled her work utopian (Fuss, 1992; Stone, 2003). To sum up Irigaray's position: 'We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine". When she submits to [such a] theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary. Subjecting herself to objectivization in discourse – by being "female". Re-objectivizing her own self whenever she claims to identify herself "as" a masculine subject. A "subject" that would re-search itself as lost (maternal-feminine) "object"?' (Irigaray, 1985a:133).

Irigaray argues for 'a self-defined woman who would not be satisfied with sameness, but whose otherness and difference would be given social and symbolic representation' (Whitford, 1991b: 24–25). Of Irigaray's relationship with psychoanalysis, Grosz writes, 'Irigaray's early works must be positioned in

the context of her reading and critique of Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Her relation to it remains extremely significant in all of her works, whether or not they specifically address psychoanalytic terms and concepts, providing a paradigm of the ways in which her position is always ambiguous, always tenuously internal to the discipline or theory she challenges. At the same time, these works position themselves at those points outside of the founding terms of theories or knowledges in those places, intolerable to and expelled by them – their vulnerable underbelly’. (Grosz, 1994: 336).

Irigaray’s (1985a) tactic is for a close reading in which she separates the text into fragments, weaving between Freud’s words and her own. ‘She never sums up the meaning of Freud’s text, nor binds all her commentaries, questions, associations into a unified representation, a coherent interpretation. Her commentaries are full of loose ends and unanswered questions’ (Gallop, 1982:56; Fielding, 2003; Irigaray, 1991). Irigaray is significantly influenced by the explanatory power of psychoanalysis in relation to the construction and reproduction of patriarchal forms of subjectivity by situating Freud, for example, as a symptom of a particular social or cultural economy (Grosz, 1990) and psychoanalysis as symptomatic of an underlying phallogocentric structure that governs dominant ideas around gender.

Irigaray is positioned distinctively in the text, and this forms an important aspect of understanding her approach to reading Freud and Lacan. For Irigaray, a Lacanian theory of the subject is only representative of a masculine account of subject formation and social life. As Grosz argues of Lacan, ‘If “style” is the object of psychoanalytic teaching and training, then Lacan’s style is deliberately provocative, stretching terms to the limits of their coherence, creating a text that is difficult to enter and ultimately impossible to master. His “style” contains the same evasions, the same duplicit speech as the unconscious itself’. (Grosz, 1990:17). Irigaray, while taking Lacan’s understanding of metaphor and metonymy seriously, also chooses to read him according to his own proclamations, that is to say, literally (Grosz, 1990).

Strategic Essentialism

In response to criticisms of biological essentialism, it is often argued that Irigaray engages in what has been termed 'strategic essentialism' (Burke et al, 1994; Grosz, 1989; Stone, 2006; Whitford, 1994). Significantly, Stone (2006) explores the idea of strategic essentialism as a way to negotiate the divide between unity and difference in feminist projects as critiques of patriarchy. Strategic essentialism (a term attributed to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak according to Stone, 2006) seeks to confront the notion that:

"If women share no common characteristics, they cannot readily be expected to mobilise in response to a common plight, or around any shared political identity or sense of allegiance. Confronted by this problem, several theorists began to advocate a new, 'strategic', form of essentialism. According to this, we should acknowledge that essentialism is false: women have no shared location or unitary female biology. Nonetheless, we should continue to act, strategically, as if essentialism were true, where this furthers political purposes." (Stone, 2006:29).

Essentialist preconceptions, as Stone further explains, are deeply embedded in dominant symbolic structures so much so that they can be overcome only when confronted and, paradoxically, repeated and redoubled. She writes: 'crucially this form of strategic essentialism is *non-realist*. It does not hold that women really have essential characteristics independently of cultural practices but, rather, claims that many traditions and practices (falsely) insist that women have such characteristics, traditions which can be challenged only through the strategic affirmation of precisely those essential characteristics on which they insist' (Stone, 2006:29).

The emergence of the concept of strategic essentialism suggested to those reading Irigaray in the late 1980s and early 1990s that her detractors had relied on a rather oversimplified view of essentialism and its political potential. 'There could, it had emerged, be different "kinds of essentialisms", with varying political consequences' (Stone, 2006:29) which could, inter alia, be politically

transformative. Whitford (1994:16) echoes this point by saying 'the binary pair essentialism/antiessentialism has been put into question. This enables essentialism to be interpreted as a *position* rather than as an ontology, and Irigaray to be interpreted as a strategist...rather than as an obscurantist prophet of essential biological or psychic difference'.

Stone (2006:30) also succinctly notes that Irigaray 'does not intend her essentialism to describe the female body realistically but to reaffirm traditional representations of the female (through sustained mimicry and paraphrase of philosophical texts) in a way which operates, politically, to subvert their meaning'. It is adopted in a temporary and deliberate manner, based not on biological differences but language where woman is not represented (Grosz, 1994; Whitford, 1991b). Having explored the question of feminine difference, psychoanalysis and strategic essentialism in Irigaray's work, the chapter now turns to exploring her use of mimesis, especially in her earlier philosophical texts.

Irigaray's Style

Mimicry and Philosophical Texts

Since the introduction of *Speculum of the Other Woman*ⁱ, Irigaray has founded some of what could now be seen as the central claims of French feminism. She has been labelled a 'gynocentric' (Young, 1985, cited in Fraser and Bartky, 1992) critic often seen as having essentialist readings of identity (cf. Deutscher, 1997; Fuss, 1992) as discussed above. Whitford (1991b) and Grosz (1994) among others have argued that she draws on language to assert how woman is not represented and deploys a style that suffuses poetry with logic and hovers between politics and love, philosophy and psychoanalysis (Martin, 2003). This approach enacts a kind of mimicry and is a challenge to philosophy and to psychoanalysis, in which Irigaray aims to speak to Freud, Plato, Heidegger and Nietzsche, to name a handful, that elicits dialogue whilst speaking passionately, poetically and politically. The textual strategy of mimicry prevalent in the early

and middle stages of her work ensued from her analysis of the Western tradition as one that could not bear the representation of a feminine subject, or the subject as feminine. With the laws of discourse and the symbolic order constructed on masculine terms, her question was: How could she speak without assuming the masculine genre? (Martin, 2003). Irigaray (1985a:140) writes, 'He must challenge her for power, for productivity. He must resurface the earth with this floor of the ideal. Identify with the law-giving father, with his proper names, his desires for making capital, in every sense of the word, desires that prefer the possession of territory, which includes language, to the exercise of his pleasures, with the exception of his pleasure in trading women – fetishized objects, merchandise of whose value he stands surety – with his peers'. Irigaray, however, has not engaged in such a style lightly (Martin, 2003) and has always been cautious about the efficacy of writing differently to bring about change (cf. Irigaray, 1993c).

An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1993)ⁱⁱ, *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985b) along with *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a) are arguably Irigaray's most influential texts existing alongside her compelling 'elemental works' such as *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1991a), *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (1999) and *Elemental Passions* (1999). Through a strategy of mimicry, Irigaray pushes psychoanalytic discourses (amongst more traditionally philosophical discourses) to their limits, thus showing their deficiency and poverty in subordinating femininity and ultimately leaving it unrepresented. The dialogue, for example, that Irigaray provides with Heidegger in *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* echoes, illustrates and reflects her style and echoes a fundamental difference in writing. 'There is always difference. If one listens to her words, one hears a dialogue, a going back and forth meant to take the path of his thinking further; she enacts the to and fro motion of criss-crossing, a folding-over relation, that asserts a limit between the two voices even as there are penetrations and mixings' (Fielding, 2003:2).

She adopts 'a double style', a style of amorous relations, writing in a move toward '[t]he wedding between the body and language' (Irigaray, 2000:17 also

cited in Fielding, 2003). By way of illustrating this theme, In *To Be Two* Irigaray outlines how to read *The Forgetting of Air* in which she cares about the gaps - the places where she feels Heidegger in this instance has not pushed his thinking far enough (due to a neglect of sexual difference). She takes Heideggerian terms and uses them in a way that mimics, yet continues and highlights the lacunae in his argument, as if inhabiting Heidegger's line of thought. Irigaray opens up a discussion with Heidegger in this way, moving through his arguments, questioning, sealing, unpicking and re-stitching his thought. Irigaray thus mimics but also invents dialogue almost as 'lovers' quarrels', to move through Heidegger's words, to fold over them but not to write over them, to give and take in one movement. The structure of books such as *Speculum of the Other Woman* also forms part of her attempts to jam the theoretical machinery and present challenges for embodied writing. Irigaray propounds, 'Strictly speaking, *Speculum* has no beginning or end. The architectonics of the text, or texts, confounds the linearity of an outline, the teleology of discourse, within which there is no possible place for the "feminine," except the traditional place of the repressed, the censured' (Irigaray, 1985b:68).

Dialogue and Embodied Writing

The constructed dialogue with her interlocutors provides a closeness and intimate philosophical readings. Irigaray's text communicates but simultaneously always leaves breathing room for the reader, for an other to come. As Whitford notes, many of her philosophical texts 'ventriloquize', they speak with others' words but they are also made her own: 'Whether one recognises the courses or not depends on one's familiarity with the philosopher, since inverted commas are seldom used' (Whitford, 1991a:9). The blurring of boundaries within her texts makes Irigaray's style dense and mellifluous. However, the structured pauses sometimes risk becoming obscurantist when lost in translation: the texts often evoke no answering echo. The textual scholarship needed to undertake Irigaray's texts make them elusive, dazzling, deliberately polysemic and difficult to unravel (Whitford, 1991a:9).

The intimate tussles with philosophers and miming of dialogue (Irigaray, 1985a; 1985b; 1991a; 1999) offer critical possibilities for invoking the feminine. The imaginary or not yet realised feminine subjectivity Irigaray writes is formulated in a way that offers possibilities of change, of women in dialogue finding their own locution that also weaves hopes for the future through her texts. As Irigaray writes,

‘Later comes the task, the work. Heavy, but light. Of different resonances, its breath fills the air, making a bridge between heaven and earth. Its ranges balance the profundity of silence, the absolute of solitude. The notes and tones vary unless they return to the single breath. The body becomes a musician, if it does not remain solely at the breath. In order to be incarnated, to arrive at your incarnation, it changes tones, methods. It feels, looks, listens, sings or speaks: to you, to her. Energy is made sense, inclination is made sensibility, desire becomes interiority’ (Irigaray, 2000:61).

Here, Irigaray writes the body attending to its senses, and as with the touching of two lips, silence becomes a way of communicating, a way which cannot be interrupted by phallogentric discourse but is *felt* or experienced *between* women rather than *for* women. By attending to tone, breath and silence she is *creating* this difference: writing the sensory and sensible. This keeps her project vital and visionary although some have felt uneasy with the utopian elements in her texts where the past, present and future are interwoven throughout.

It is the creative power of imagination that one can celebrate in Irigaray’s work and as Whitford (1991b) argues, one cannot fix her in a single meaning or a single moment of text. The most productive readings of her texts are dynamic and engage and exchange with her work as an interlocutor as she produces writing that cannot be reduced to a narrative or a commentary. Burke et al’s (1994a) edited collection demonstrates such an engagement. Braidotti’s contribution, for example, examines ways in which Irigaray’s oeuvre provide a ‘systematic and multifaceted attempt to redesign our understanding of the

thinking subject, in a language and a form of representation that adequately renders women's experience' (Braidotti, 1994:111) in which Irigaray sexualises, through the feminine, the very structures of subjectivity. By examining the becoming-woman, Braidotti shows that the process of becoming is primarily a process of repetition, of mimesis, of cyclical returns.

Irigaray also evokes an embodied dialogue in the section *Speaking of Immemorial Waters* in *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, where she writes, 'How should I love you if to speak to you were possible. And yet I still love you too well in my silence to remember the movement of my own becoming. Perpetually am I troubled, stirred, frozen, or smothered by the noise of your death' (Irigaray, 1991a:3). By engaging in a double-style of mimicry and dialogue Irigaray forces the interlocutor/reader into play in order to read her enigmatic texts where the response is not a passive consumption but a productive process.

Furthermore, Hodge (1994:194) in her essay '*Irigaray Reading Heidegger*' articulates this difference and how Irigaray reads back into philosophical and heroic texts a subversive femininity that is both contained and expelled. For example, as she notes in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 'She does not look for an alternative tradition of forgotten or undervalued texts, written by women. She looks for the silencing gesture of these alternative voices in the heroic texts themselves, and seeks by brushing these texts against the grain *to empower that silenced energy*.'

This is most apparent in Irigaray's re-writing of the philosophers (cf. Chanter, 1995), where she demonstrates how the death and transfiguration of Socrates inscribed at the beginning of philosophy conceals the death of the mother. Irigaray empowers the silenced energy of the texts in her re-writing of the myth of the cave in the section *Plato's Hystera of Speculum*,

' "While carrying their burdens, some of them, as you would expect, are talking, others silent." As you would expect. Really and truly? Yes, you would expect it, given the systems of duplication, the rules of duplicity,

that organize the cave. For if everyone talked, and talked at once, the background noise would make it difficult or even impossible for the doubling process known as an echo to occur. The reflection of sound would be *spoiled* if different speakers uttered different things at the same time. Sounds would thereby become ill defined, fuzzy, inchoate, indistinct, devoid of figures that can be reflected and reproduced. If everyone spoke, and spoke at once, the silence of the others would no longer form the *background* necessary to highlight or outline the words of some, or of one. Silence or blanks function here in two ways to allow replication. *Of likeness.*' (Irigaray, 1985a:256-257).

In this excerpt, Irigaray draws on the lack of voice for women by re-writing Plato's myth. Irigaray rewrites the myth by taking Plato's words and introducing another way of reading them, in this instance by re-reading sound. She pushes his ideas to their limit through mimicry and creating a dialogue. She uses the interiority of his thought and writes with the body in order to re-organise the cave. This close reading serves to show how Irigaray portrays language as suppressive to the needs of women and makes a turn to embodiment where the body is a site for the creative possibilities of the sexually specific body through focusing on the visceral and embodied.

Implications For Understanding Gendered Relations in Organizations

For organizations, replete with relationships of domination and subordination, Irigaray provides a theoretical perspective that examines who has claims to knowledge or legitimate voice, and the social/discursive relations which sustain these intersections. This, in turn exposes 'the importance of the structure masculinity/femininity in sustaining the durability of practices, discourses, and forms of signification that allow certain activities the claim of knowledge, while disallowing others' (Calás and Smircich, 1991:571; Martin, 1990). It is to these critical possibilities that we should look in order to change the organisations in which we work. Without such modes of ethical being we are destined to be 'the same....Same...Always the same' (Irigaray, 1985b:205).

As Höpfl (2011:28) notes, Irigaray 'is identifying the problem of what it is to be a woman within the phallogocentric discourse: what it is to be constructed in a way which conforms to patriarchal notions of order and authority, and what it is to be regulated by representations which are at variance with embodied experience'. Many have argued that Irigaray's focus on love between women is a way of realizing a feminine language that breaks patriarchal language structures through the insistence on sexually specific subjects rather than the mediation of one by the other (what she refers to as 'the other of the same', that is the self-same relations of phallogocentrism, or how language is structured in a way that only represents the masculine subject, see Vachhani, forthcoming).

As Irigaray writes, 'If we keep speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as men have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we'll miss each other, fail ourselves. Again ... Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads. They'll vanish and we'll be lost. Far off, up high. Absent from ourselves: we'll be spoken machines, speaking machines. Enveloped in proper skins, but our own. Withdrawn into proper names, violated by them. Not yours, not mine. We don't have any. We change names as men exchange us, exchanged by them, to be so changeable'. (Irigaray, 1985b:205). This thinking offers us new ways of understanding discrimination in the workplace, by providing a way of re-imagining femininity such that we can open up new spaces of symbolization and representation for women (Vachhani, forthcoming).

As examined earlier, Irigaray explores identity which is assumed in language within a particular (patriarchal) symbolic system in which the only possible subject-position is masculine. Within this system, the only feminine identity available to women is that of 'defective' or 'castrated' men; women are not symbolically self-defined. (Whitford, 1991b:3). This approach helps understand women's role in leadership in a more expansive and theoretically rich manner beyond representations of women leaders as overly masculine, bossy or aggressive (Pullen and Vachhani, 2017).

The concepts of proximity and amorous exchange are central in Irigaray's texts which constitute a rethinking of ethics, as embodied ethics. As Whitford (1991b:165) writes, 'the amorous exchange is not the exchange of commodities but a mode of ethical being. The horizon opened up by the woman's accession to her own space-time is that of fertility and creation...In order to become a woman, it seems, it is first necessary to rethink all the categories which structure our thought and experience. It is not just a question of inventing some new terms, but of a total symbolic redistribution'. Creating fairer organizations demands consideration of gendered difference or, as Irigaray writes, an ethics of sexual difference: 'that is, an ethics which recognizes the subjectivity of each sex, would have to address the symbolic division which allocates the material, corporeal, sensible, 'natural' to the feminine, and the spiritual, ideal, intelligible, transcendental to the masculine' (Whitford, 1991b:149).

To end, as Toye (2010: 47) notes, 'Irigaray constantly emphasizes the space of mediation between two subjects, what figures are used in our culture to convey this space, and how, by offering alternative figures to occupy this space, might a revolution in thought and ethics occur'. Such a culture of difference succeeds traditional, dualistic thinking as the hierarchical relationship between masculine and feminine in organizations. What we learn from Irigaray, and also Höpfl's foundational work in the field of work and organisation, are the ways in which mastery and rationality have disciplining effects. Feminine writing and ethical difference through Irigaray, inhabits a political position, one that insinuates resistance (Höpfl, 2011) and which identifies organizations as sites that are not able to bear the weight of the feminine and insists on the self-definition of women in the workplace.

Further readings

Original text:

Irigaray, L (1993) – *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans C. Burke and GC Gill. London: Athlone.

Key academic paper:

Vachhani, S.J. (2012) 'The subordination of the feminine? Developing a critical feminist approach to the psychoanalysis of organisations'. *Organization Studies*, 33(9): 1237–55.

Key texts on Luce Irigaray's work:

Jones, R (2011) *Irigaray*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Whitford, M (1991b) – *Luce Irigaray – Philosophy in the Feminine*. London: Routledge.

References

- Atkin, I and Hassard, J (1996) – 'Liberation from Within? Organizational Implications of Irigaray's Concept of "Residue"', in D. Boje, RP Gephart Jr, and TJ Thatchenkery (Eds) *Postmodern Management and Organization Theory*. London: Sage.
- Braidotti, R (1994a) – "Of Bugs and Women: Irigaray and Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman", in C Burke, N Schor and M Whitford (Eds) *Engaging with Irigaray*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Burke, C. (1980) 'Introduction to Luce Irigaray's "When Our Lips Speak Together"'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 6(1):66–8.
- Burke, C, Schor, N and Whitford, M (Eds) (1994) – *Engaging with Irigaray – Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Calás, M. B., & Smircich, L. (1991). 'Voicing seduction to silence leadership'. *Organization Studies*, 12: 567–602.
- Chanter, T (1995) – *Ethics of Eros – Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers*. London: Routledge.
- Dale, K. (2001) *Anatomising Embodiment and Organization Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deutscher, P (1997) – *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Fielding, H. (2003). 'Questioning nature: Irigaray, Heidegger and the potentiality of matter'. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 36(1), 1–26.
- Fotaki, M. (2009). 'The unwanted body of man or why is it so difficult for women to make it in academe? A feminist psychoanalytic approach'. In M. Özbilgin (Ed.), *Equality, diversity and inclusion at work: A research companion* (pp.57–71). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

- Fotaki, M., Metcalfe, B. and Harding, N. (2014). 'Writing materiality into management and organization studies through and with Luce Irigaray'. *Human Relations*, 67(10): 1239-1263.
- Fraser, N (1992) – 'The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theories for Feminist Politics', in N Fraser and SL Bartky (Eds) *Revaluing French Feminism – Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Fraser, N and Bartky, SL (Eds) (1992) - *Revaluing French Feminism – Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Fuss, D.J. (1992) – 'Essentially Speaking: Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence' in N Fraser and SL Bartky (Eds) *Revaluing French Feminism – Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gallop, J. (1982) - *Feminism and psychoanalysis: The daughter's seduction*. London: Macmillan.
- Grosz, E (1989) – *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Grosz, E. (1990) - *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Grosz, E. (1994) - 'The hetero and the homo: The sexual ethics of Luce Irigaray'. In C. Burke, N. Schor, & M. Whitford (Eds.), *Engaging with Irigaray* (pp. 335–350). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hassard, J., Keleman, M., & Wolfram Cox, J. (2008). *Disorganization theory: Explorations in alternative organizational analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Hekman, S (1999) – 'Identity Crises: Identity, Identity Politics and Beyond', in S Hekman (Ed) (1999) *Feminism, Identity and Difference*. Essex: Frank Cass.
- Hodge, J (1994) – 'Irigaray Reading Heidegger', in C Burke, N Schor and M Whitford (Eds) *Engaging with Irigaray*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Höpfl, H. (2011) 'Women's writing'. In Jeanes, E.L., Knights, D. and Yancey Martin, P. (eds) *Handbook of Gender, Work and Organization*, pp. 25–36. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Irigaray, L (1985a) – *Speculum of The Other Woman*. Trans G.C. Gill. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Irigaray, L (1985b) – *This Sex Which is Not One*. Trans. C. Porter. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Irigaray, L (1991a) – *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Trans. GC Gill. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Irigaray, L (1991b) – *The Irigaray Reader*. M Whitford (Ed). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Irigaray, L (1992) – *Elemental Passions*. Trans. J Collie and J Still. London: Athlone.
- Irigaray, L (1993a) – *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans C. Burke and GC Gill. London: Athlone.

- Irigaray, L (1993b) - *Sexes and Genealogies*. Trans. G.C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Irigaray, L (1993c) - *Je, Tu, Nous – Toward a Culture of Difference*. Trans. A. Martin. London: Routledge.
- Irigaray, L (1999) - *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. Trans. M.B. Mader. Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Irigaray, L (2000) - *To Be Two*. Trans. M.M. Rhodes and M.F. Cocito-Monoc. London: Athlone.
- Jones, R (2011) *Irigaray*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kenny, K., & Bell, E. (2011). Representing the successful managerial body. In E. Jeanes, D. Knights, & P. Yancey Martin (Eds.), *Handbook of Gender, Work and Organization* (pp. 163–176). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lennon, K and Whitford, M (Eds.) (1994) - *Knowing the Difference – Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*. London: Routledge.
- Martin, A (2003) - 'Introduction – Luce Irigaray and the Culture of Difference', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 20(3):1-12.
- Martin, J. (1990) - 'Deconstructing organizational taboos: The suppression of gender conflict in organizations'. *Organization Science*, 1: 339–359.
- Metcalf, B. (2005). Exiling the feminine? Re-imagining Luce Irigaray in the philosophy of organization. Paper presented at the *Critical Management Studies Conference*.
- Oseen, C (1997) - 'Luce Irigaray, Sexual Difference and Theorizing Leaders and Leadership', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 4(3):170-184.
- Phelan, S (1999) - 'Bodies, Passions and Citizenship', in S. Hekman (Ed) *Feminism, Identity and Difference*. Essex: Frank Cass.
- Pullen, A & Vachhani, SJ (2017) 'A leadership ethics of sexual difference?'. in: A Bolsø, SO Sørensen, SHB Svendsen (eds) *Bodies, Symbols and Organizational Practice: The Gendered Dynamics of Power*. London & New York, Routledge.
- Stone, A. (2006) *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stone, A. (2003). The sex of nature: A reinterpretation of Irigaray's metaphysics and political thought. *Hypatia*, 18(3), 60–84.
- Vachhani, S.J. (2012) 'The subordination of the feminine? Developing a critical feminist approach to the psychoanalysis of organisations'. *Organization Studies*, 33(9): 1237–55.
- Vachhani, SJ (2015) 'Organizing Love — Thoughts on the Transformative and Activist Potential of Feminine Writing'. *Gender, Work and Organization* 22(2): 148-162.
- Vachhani, SJ (forthcoming) 'Rethinking the Politics of Writing Differently Through *Écriture Féminine*', *Management Learning*, forthcoming

- Weedon, C (1999) – *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Whitford, M (1991a) – ‘Introductory Chapters’ in L Irigaray, *The Irigaray Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Whitford, M (1991b) – *Luce Irigaray – Philosophy in the Feminine*. London: Routledge.
- Whitford, M (1994) – ‘Reading Irigaray in the Nineties’, in C. Burke, N. Schor and M. Whitford (Eds) *Engaging with Irigaray*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Endnotes

ⁱ Originally published in French in 1974.

ⁱⁱ Dates shown denote the first translated imprint in Great Britain.

Contact Details:

Sheena Vachhani
Department of Management
School of Economics, Finance & Management
University of Bristol
Howard House
Queens Avenue
BS8 1SN
UK
Tel: +44(0)117 9288438
Email: s.vachhani@bristol.ac.uk